

Lori Lightfoot defeats Toni Preckwinkle in low-turnout Chicago election

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Chicago mayoral candidate Lori Lightfoot won an easy victory in the April 2 runoff vote, with 73.7 percent of the vote, compared to only 26.3 percent for Toni Preckwinkle, president of the Cook County Board. Lightfoot swept all 50 of the city's wards, from the wealthiest to the poorest, and polled some of her biggest totals in precincts heavily populated by police.

A corporate lawyer and former federal prosecutor, Lightfoot came to prominence when she was brought in by Mayor Rahm Emanuel to whitewash rampant violence and murder by the Chicago Police Department. Her victory was the outcome, not of any widespread popular support, but of a decision by nearly every faction of the Chicago political establishment that Lightfoot would be a more capable and ruthless foe of the working class than Preckwinkle, a longtime figure in the Democratic Party machine.

In the primary contest in February, Lightfoot led only narrowly, receiving 93,580 votes, or 17.43 percent of the total, compared to Preckwinkle's 86,181 votes, or 16.05 percent. Former US Commerce Secretary Bill Daley, brother of the former mayor Richard M. Daley, who had the bulk of the corporate support, finished third with 78,955 votes, or 14.7 percent, and narrowly failed to make the runoff. In the runoff, Lightfoot's vote rose to 364,965, up 290 percent. Preckwinkle's vote rose to 130,327, up only 51 percent.

Among the dozen candidates who divided up the balance of the vote in the primary, not a single one endorsed Preckwinkle in the runoff, but many endorsed Lightfoot, including Willie Wilson, the black Democrat who won the most votes on the city's south side, Paul Vallas, a right-wing former school superintendent and supporter of charter schools, and Gerry Chico, a longtime ally of Congressman Chuy Garcia, who lost the mayoral race to Emanuel in 2015. Garcia also supported Lightfoot.

The result of shifting alignments after the primary, with an unexpected runoff between two black women, each with deep ties to the corporate and political elite, was that Lightfoot gained the endorsement of virtually the entire bourgeois political spectrum, from the Our Revolution group

of Bernie Sanders to the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. Both major daily newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*, supported her editorially.

Besides the Chicago Teachers Union, several other unions supported Preckwinkle, along with two South Side congressmen, Bobby Rush and Danny Davis, and three women with close ties to the Obama White House: Valerie Jarrett, Desirée Rogers and Tina Tchen. Obama himself made no endorsement, merely tweeting congratulations to Lightfoot after her landslide victory was confirmed.

The most important feature of the runoff vote was the mass disaffection shown to both candidates, who represented different factions of the Democratic Party machine that has long dominated Chicago city government. While the official count of all ballots is still underway, it is expected to set a record low for an actually contested race (not counting the nominal opposition faced by Mayor Richard M. Daley during his 20 years in office).

A little more than half a million are reported to have voted. By comparison, when Harold Washington was elected mayor in 1983, the voter turnout was more than 1.3 million. Some precincts actually reported no one voting out of hundreds registered, although that may reflect machine errors rather than a total absence of voters.

Lightfoot made use of her identity as a black woman who is openly gay to cast herself as a progressive. But she is a corporate lawyer who has worked as a federal prosecutor. She is also a seasoned political apologist for the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and its related agencies.

In 2015, after the political crisis erupted in the wake of the murder and official coverup of Southwest Side teenager Laquan McDonald, shot 16 times by Chicago police officer Jason van Dyke, it was Lightfoot whom Emanuel appointed to pull his fat from the fire. She oversaw the police accountability task force that produced a report indicating what everyone knows: the Chicago police are indeed lethally violent and racist.

One recommendation produced by Lightfoot's task force was that the discredited Independent Police Review

Authority (IPRA) be replaced by another body, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability. In choosing Lightfoot, Emanuel had her reprise an earlier role. She once headed the Chicago Police Department's Office of Professional Standards (OPS), a body that was replaced by the IPRA following OPS's failure to act against the police implicated in the torture ring led by Chicago Police Department Commander Jon Burge.

Significantly, the most conservative wards on the far northwest and far southwest sides, home to many police officers, voted for Lightfoot in the highest numbers. The affluent North Side saw 30-50 percent voter turnout. Turnout in working class and poorer neighborhoods like Little Village, Hegewisch, and large swathes of the South and West sides appeared very low. Full figures are still coming in.

Rep. Bobby L. Rush, the former Black Panther-turned Democratic Party machine politician, denounced Lightfoot for her role in the police cover-ups. "If any young black male or female is killed by a police officer under a Lightfoot administration, then the blood would be on those voters' hands who elected her," he said. Despite such rhetoric, however, even in the South Side of Chicago, which has seen the worst cases of police violence, Preckwinkle could not win a single ward.

Preckwinkle is currently head of both the Cook County Board and the Cook County Democratic Party. She was closely tied to the corruption scandal surrounding alderman Edward Burke and had to return \$116,000 in campaign contributions raised for her by Burke and his cronies.

Lightfoot and Preckwinkle will work together after the new mayor takes office May 20. On Wednesday, both candidates sought to publicly unify their aims as the incoming city leader and current county board president and boss of the regional Democratic Party.

At a prayer vigil Wednesday hosted by Rainbow/PUSH and overseen by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Lightfoot and Preckwinkle held hands. Lightfoot said, "I'm looking forward to the future. I'm looking ahead to hard work in the coming weeks and to collaborating with President Preckwinkle and other elected officials to bring the change that Chicagoans voted for and that we so desperately need."

Lightfoot also met with outgoing Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson. The *Tribune* reported that the discussion with Johnson focused on the plans to respond to the anticipated surge in street violence over the summer.

Fifteen aldermanic runoff elections also took place Tuesday and 14 are expected to result in newcomers to the city council. Four of those were endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), three of whom have beaten

their opponents outright.

Jeanette Taylor, Byron Sigcho Lopez, Dan La Spata and Andre Vasquez will take seats on the city council. The race between Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez and incumbent Deb Mell was too close to call and votes are still being counted.

In the 20th ward, Jeanette Taylor, from the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, was a prominent figure in the 2015 hunger strike protest against the closure of Dyett High School. Taylor campaigned on demanding a community benefits agreement for the new Obama Presidential Center to be built in Jackson Park. The project organizers have opposed making any commitment to the neighborhood.

Daniel La Spata, who beat incumbent Proco "Joe" Moreno for the 1st ward seat in the February 26 primary, joined DSA this year as he sought its endorsement for this race. Vasquez ousted 36-year city council veteran Patrick O'Connor, Emanuel's floor leader, from his seat in the 40th ward on the far north side in the runoff.

Byron Sigcho Lopez, of the Pilsen Alliance, ran for alderman in the 25th ward on the southwest side, having joined DSA in recent months. The 25th ward incumbent candidate, Danny Solis, was snared in the recent federal corruption investigation.

Several of the other newcomers to the city council were endorsed by United Working Families and/or the Chicago Teachers Union and together could operate as a significant bloc on the city council.



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